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Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme

Letter dated 11 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As you are aware, the Government of the Republic of Mozambique hosted a seminar for the representatives of the eight Governments of the "Delivering as One" pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam), together with representatives of the Government of Malawi, in Maputo from 21 to 23 May 2008, to review the lessons learned from the one year of experience of their countries in the implementation of the Delivering as One initiative and to exchange views on how to move the process forward, while advancing the implementation of the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 62/208.

I wish to seize this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for the valuable support provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Development Group Office, the United

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Nations Evaluation Group and the United Nations Country Team of Mozambique in organizing and facilitating the event.

The text of the summary statement of the outcomes of the Maputo seminar, setting forth the findings of the one year of experience of the programme pilot countries in Delivering as One and recommendations on the way forward is transmitted herewith for your consideration (see annex).

Among the general findings, the meeting stressed, inter-alia, that the participating countries had become pilots at the specific request of their national Governments in the hope that a more coherent United Nations system would better support the Governments in achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The participants further emphasized that national ownership in their development partnership with the United Nations system had been enhanced through the Delivering as One process. They noted the great diversity of their national circumstances and agreed that in their experiences in Delivering as One, the "no one size fits all" principle was also being upheld.

The seminar reaffirmed the gains made by the Delivering as One pilot countries and the other participants with respect to enhancing Government leadership of United Nations system operational activities for development, in line with relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 62/208.

Initial indications were that the pilot process was yielding positive results in ensuring the presence of a more effective and coherent counterpart of its national partners, and that reports of both the Governments and the United Nations country teams indicated there had been increased availability of the United Nations system's mandates and expertise for meeting the objectives of national plans and priorities.

The lack of predictability and timeliness of funding, the lack of harmonization and simplification of business practices, high transaction costs of the United Nations generally, poor alignment of United Nations capacities with the priorities of programme countries, and a low level of use of national operational capacities were found to be among the major constraints on full implementation and acceleration of the Delivering as One initiative.

The seminar provided a set of specific recommendations for accelerating the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/208 in areas of national ownership and leadership, alignment of United Nations capacity to the needs of programme countries, coherence of budgetary and funding processes, leadership and coordination of United Nations country teams, joint offices and simplified business practices, among other equally important objectives.

I should be grateful if you could arrange to have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 57 of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda items 3 (a) and (b).

(*Signed*) Filipe **Chidumo**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 11 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Summary statement of outcomes and the way forward of the seminar of the programme pilot countries on Delivering as One: exchange of experiences and lessons learned

Maputo, 21-23 May 2008

1. Representatives of the eight Governments of the "Delivering as One" pilot countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam), together with representatives of the Government of Malawi, met in Maputo from 21 to 23 May 2008 to review the lessons derived from the one year of experience of their countries in Delivering as One and to discuss how to move forward while advancing the implementation of the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 62/208.

2. The participants in the seminar express their thanks to the Government of Mozambique for hosting the seminar, Luísa Dias Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique, for her inspiring address at the opening of the seminar, the Co-Chairs of the General Assembly Informal Consultations on System-wide Coherence for their active participation, and Anna Tibaijuka, General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), for her statement on behalf of the Deputy Secretary-General. The participants also express their thanks to the Australian Agency for International Development for its provision of support to this meeting and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Development Group Office, the United Nations Evaluation Group and the United Nations Country Team of Mozambique for their valuable support in organizing and facilitating the event.

Introductory comments

3. The participants stress their commitment to the full and speedy implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/208, adopted without a vote, on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. In that resolution, the Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to support "programme country pilot" countries in evaluating and exchanging experiences and lessons learned with the support of the United Nations Evaluation Group (para. 139). The participants consider the present seminar to be a response to paragraph 139 of that resolution and a contribution to the proceedings of the operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment of the substantive session of 2008 of the Economic and Social Council.

4. The purpose of the seminar was to provide an opportunity for Government representatives of the eight pilot programme countries, and other programme countries with similar processes, to learn from each other on successes, constraints and remaining challenges in implementing the Delivering as One experience and how to move forward. It was also intended to assist those countries in sharing their common perspectives with the United Nations system so that lessons learned could

be used to further the implementation of resolution 62/208 towards greater coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system.

5. The participants recognize that, with the exception of Cape Verde and Viet Nam, the reform of the United Nations at country level had started only in 2007. Findings are thus preliminary and pertain to process aspects, as it is too early to evaluate development effectiveness of the Delivering as One initiative. A more complete picture will emerge once an independent evaluation has been conducted in 2009-2010.

6. The participants invite the General Assembly to fully support the countries engaged in Delivering as One in their continuing efforts.

General findings

7. The participants stress that the pilot countries became pilots at the specific request of their national Governments. In making such requests, the expectations of the Governments had been high, including the hope that a more coherent United Nations system would better support the Governments in achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

8. The experience of the participants was that national ownership in their development partnership with the United Nations system had been enhanced through the Delivering as One process. They noted the great diversity of their national circumstances and agreed that in their experience of Delivering as One, the "no one size fits all" principle was also being upheld.

9. The meeting reaffirmed the gains made by the Delivering as One pilot countries and the other participant countries with respect to enhancing Government leadership of United Nations system operational activities for development. This increased engagement and direction from national Governments are very much in the spirit of General Assembly resolution 62/208.

10. Initial indications are that the pilot process is yielding positive results in ensuring that the United Nations development system is a more effective and coherent counterpart of its national partners. Reports from both the Governments and the United Nations country teams indicate that there has been increased availability of the United Nations system's mandates and expertise for meeting national plans and priorities.

11. Progress has been made in promoting a more unified United Nations system approach to programming and funding its support to countries, through the one programme and one budget. The Governments involved in the Delivering as One initiative clearly recognize and appreciate the progress made but more needs to be done to avoid fragmentation and deliver as one at the country level. Representatives of the pilot and the non-pilot Governments all recognize the need to work even harder towards the success of the initiative.

12. However, major constraints remain on the way towards implementing fully and accelerating the Delivering as One initiative. These include the lack of predictability and timeliness of funding, lack of harmonization and simplification of business practices, high transaction costs of the United Nations generally, and poor alignment

of United Nations capacities with the priorities of programme countries, as well as a low level of use of national operational capacities.

Recommendations

To accelerate the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/208, the participants at the meeting representing the nine Governments:

National ownership and leadership

13. Underscore that the principle of national ownership and leadership should continue to guide all operational activities for development of the United Nations at the country level.

14. Recognize that the effectiveness of the operational activities of the United Nations is contingent on both a well-coordinated and well-extended United Nations country team with empowered members, and a well-coordinated Government; and that, where necessary, this may require the establishment of new, or further improvement of existing, national coordination structures so as to provide strategic orientation and programme implementation monitoring functions.

15. Also recognize that the United Nations can play an important role in supporting and strengthening the national role and capacity with respect to coordinating actions of the donor community.

16. Recall that the General Assembly encouraged Member States to invite the United Nations to participate, ex officio, in current and new aid modalities and coordination mechanisms, and its invitation to the United Nations development system to enhance its participation in this regard; and invite the Assembly to give encouragement to the countries concerned in their continuing efforts.

17. Stress that the United Nations operational activities should focus on national capacity-building, provision of normative and policy advice, and strategic support for the reduction of poverty, and make use of national implementation capacities in consultation and coordination with the national authorities concerned.

Specifically to ensure the success of the Delivering as One initiative, the participants at the meeting:

18. Call upon United Nations organizations to support Governments of pilot countries and the United Nations country teams in sustaining efforts to mobilize timely and predictable financial support for the Delivering as One initiative, including through common Government/United Nations mechanisms and processes, and new funding mobilization instruments, where necessary and appropriate.

19. Underline that, in those countries in which the One United Nations programme does not cover the whole United Nations Development Assistance Framework, resources should not be shifted to the One United Nations programme to the detriment of the remaining components of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

20. Recognize that the establishment of new national coordination structures has been conducive to strengthening Government ownership and leadership and the alignment of the operational activities of the United Nations with national priorities.

It should be ensured that these structures provide strategic orientation and programme implementation monitoring functions to the Delivering as One process at the country level.

Alignment of United Nations capacity to the needs of programme countries

21. Acknowledge the pressing need to strengthen national capacities and recall the need to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach by the United Nations development system in its support for capacity development efforts of programme countries.

22. Reiterate the need for the range and level of skills and expertise assembled by the United Nations system at the country level to be commensurate with the requirements for delivering on the priorities specified in each country's United Nations Development Assistance Framework or One United Nations plan/programme, in line with the national development strategies and plans, including poverty reduction strategy papers, where they exist, and to correspond to the technical backstopping and capacity-building needs and requirements of developing countries.

23. Stress that cost-saving measures and restructuring processes are not ends in themselves but need to be evaluated in the context of the objective of enhanced effectiveness and impact.

24. Call upon the funds, programmes and agencies to accelerate the reform of their headquarters to enable them to respond more effectively and rapidly to the needs of programme countries, and particularly to the pilot countries of the Delivering as One initiative, which are currently undergoing capacity assessments.

Harmonization and integration of planning and programming instruments

25. Call upon the governing bodies of the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies to urgently take necessary decisions to further simplify and fully harmonize the planning, programming and programme approval process.

26. Call upon the Secretary-General, through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination/United Nations Development Group, to explore a simplified programme approval process for common country programmes and make suggestions to the Economic and Social Council in this regard.

27. Call upon the United Nations Development Group to make use of the pilots to explore and implement further simplification and harmonization of the country programming process, building on the positive experiences achieved with the common operational document.

Coherence of budgetary and funding processes

28. Call upon donors to make multi-year and unearmarked contributions to the One United Nations programme at the country level to allow for resource predictability and therefore improve the timeliness and effectiveness of implementation of programme activities, as well as to endeavour to fully finance the requirements of the One United Nations programme, without causing this to affect bilateral development programmes.

29. Underline that sector-wide approaches (SWAps) should be increasingly adopted as the mechanism for donor funding at the country level as it moves towards the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and complements the process of United Nations reform at the country level.

30. Recommend, as per paragraph 37 of General Assembly resolution 62/208, that the United Nations should develop a strategy and capacity to help strengthen the national fiduciary and budget management capacity of the Government. This can be conducted as part of the development assistance within the United Nations programme.

31. Urge all donors to recognize a common United Nations progress and financial report format as part of the memorandum of understanding that governs the One United Nations fund.

Leadership and coordination of the United Nations country team

32. Recognize the importance of strengthened leadership of the resident coordinator at the head of an empowered United Nations country team, and stress the importance of strengthening the role, and authority and coordination capacity of the resident coordinator through greater delegation of authority by the funds, programmes and agencies.

33. Call upon the United Nations funds, programmes and agencies to consistently support the resident coordinator recruitment and selection process by encouraging the best candidates to apply. The importance of coordination and leadership capacities of resident coordinators and leaders of local United Nations entities needs to be given due consideration during the recruitment and selection processes.

34. Stress that standard basic agreements between Governments and the United Nations should be amended, where relevant, to reinforce and clarify the responsibilities and accountability subsisting between the United Nations country team and the Governments, while maintaining privileges and immunities.

35. Underscore that all United Nations country teams should adopt codes of conduct on the basis of harmonized models developed by the United Nations Development Group Office, and that these should specify, inter alia, the reporting relationships and communication responsibilities.

36. Underline that there should be mutual accountability among country team members. The resident coordinator should not be the only officer to be held accountable. The performance evaluation mechanisms of the agencies should rapidly include assessment of agency heads' contribution to the cohesiveness of the United Nations country team and its capacity to respond to the priorities of the host country.

37. Call upon headquarters of agencies, funds and programmes to consistently support and promote efforts by United Nations country teams to respond to requests of Governments for enhancing coherence, delivery, and communication as one, including, and particularly, through their regional structures. Concrete performance appraisal should be introduced, where it does not yet exist, in order for managers at headquarters to facilitate the reform process at the country level.

38. Stress the importance of the continuity of the United Nations country team and the resident coordinator, as well as the need for involvement of the resident

coordinator in the selection process of senior United Nations country team members. Headquarters need to improve the succession process for United Nations country team members. Extended vacancies and important disruptions, that is to say, too many changes at one time, should be avoided. The changing of heads and resident coordinators too frequently should also be avoided, if possible.

Specifically to ensure the success of the Delivering as One initiative, the participants at the meeting:

39. Stress that the One United Nations programme/plan between the Government and the United Nations country team should recall that the resident coordinator is responsible, with the support of the United Nations country team, for reporting to the Government on the implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (para. 96 of resolution 62/208), notwithstanding the administrative agent's responsibility for reporting on financial issues and, in some cases, on progress, to the donors in respect of the implementation of the One United Nations fund.

Joint offices and harmonized and simplified business practices

40. Call upon the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to accelerate the process of harmonizing United Nations business practices so as to allow for countries to progress in coherence and effectiveness, while bearing in mind Government-preferred aid modalities.

41. Stress that the United Nations needs to act (quickly) on the issue of human resources, specifically in order to respond to the changes required at the country level owing to United Nations reform (capacity assessments). Staff need to be encouraged so that they are motivated to respond to the needs at the country level.

Specifically, in regard to the pilot countries:

42. Stress that the development of a United Nations premises should be not only viewed as one of the solutions with regard to the harmonization of business practices but also based on cost-effectiveness.

43. Also stress that pilots should be allowed the space to "test" initiatives relating to business practices; otherwise, the planned common services and business practices will remain on a wish list of intentions instead of being translated into actual efficiencies.

Transaction costs, use of savings and increased use of national systems

44. Call upon funds, programmes and agencies to accelerate the implementation of the recommendations contained in paragraphs 37, 39 and 119 of General Assembly resolution 62/208, in which the Assembly requested United Nations agencies to refocus on the increased use of national systems and strengthening capacities, where needed, at country level (finance, procurement, programme delivery, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation), and request the United Nations to undertake assessments of relevant national capacities, identify areas that need strengthening, and set targets for strengthening the required capacities with a view to adopting them.

45. Call upon United Nations agencies, funds and programmes at the headquarters level to allow United Nations country teams, in close coordination with Governments, to identify the best ways and means through which administrative savings can be ploughed back into programme budgets, as mentioned in paragraphs 104 (b) and 114 of General Assembly resolution 62/208, while averting audit objections.

46. Look forward to the work of the Economic and Social Council, through the Development Cooperation Forum, on facilitating the development of clearly defined standards for the provision of development assistance, so as to help promote the adoption and strengthening of national systems by the United Nations.

Specifically, in regard to the pilot countries:

47. Underscore that transaction costs need to be clearly defined and a methodology developed by the United Nations Development Group and Governments on how to measure them. Transaction costs need then to be documented, before, during and after a United Nations reform exercise at the country level. The impact on transaction costs of implementing the recommendations of the capacity assessments needs to be focused on.

48. Call upon the headquarters of funds, programmes and agencies to ensure that missions at the country level are jointly and better coordinated (see paras. 118 and 119 of General Assembly resolution 62/208) and that harmonized outcomes are reported back to the Government.

Communication: coordination with Governments, results and accountability and public awareness

49. Underline also that too many reports have to be prepared by the United Nations country team for various donors and urge donors to recognize a common format for United Nations progress and financial reports.

50. Underscore that, in countries in transition, middle-income countries and other countries in which the United Nations country team needs to rapidly adapt to a changing environment, it is advisable that the Government establish mechanisms that work specifically with the United Nations country team to guide the evolution of the partnership between the Government and the United Nations country team, and continue to enhance the relevance of the United Nations for those countries.

51. Stress that the resident coordinator is responsible, with support from the agencies, for reporting to the Government on the implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (para. 96 of General Assembly resolution 62/208). All new United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks should therefore stipulate this responsibility. Call upon the United Nations Development Group to assist country teams in developing common reporting instruments in this regard.

Monitoring and evaluation (including evaluability)

52. While underlining the responsibility of Governments for evaluation as per General Assembly resolution 62/208, recognize that the United Nations system and the Governments will jointly oversee the conduct of the evaluation of the Delivering as One pilots and determine the value added of the One United Nations programme.

53. Stress that experiences (positive and negative) should be shared across pilots to accelerate learning and adopting of best practices. Learning/experiences from the pilots should also be communicated throughout the membership of the United Nations so as to assist possible self-starter countries.

54. Encourage pilot countries to develop a system for self-evaluation based on agreed indicators/targets.

55. Recognize the gaps in pilot countries' level of preparedness for the independent evaluation scheduled for 2010 and resolve to address these gaps as soon as possible, inter alia, by establishing results-based frameworks using simple methodologies.

56. Stress that monitoring and evaluation systems should rely on Government institutions and data to monitor progress, to the maximum extent possible.